

## Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 EB-07 ACDA-05 MC-02 OMB-01 ( ISO ) W

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R 210442Z JUL 75

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8004

INFO AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

COMUSMACTHAI BANGKOK TH

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 14547

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PFOR, LA, TH

SUBJECT: THAI-LAO RELATIONS: TRYING TO MAINTAIN  
A STEADY COURSE

REF: A) BANGKOK 13747 (NOTAL)

B) VIENTIANE 4871

SUMMARY: THE RTG IS EXERCISING PATIENCE AS IT SEEKS TO  
AVOID CONFRONTATIONS WITS NEWLY MILITANT YOUNGER  
BROTHER TO THE NORTH. END SUMMARY

1. THAILAND HAS BEEN PAYING CONSIDERABLE ATTENTION TO  
LAOS IN THE PAST FEW WEEKS. EVENTS INSIDE LAOS, TWO  
SHORE-BASED PATHET LAO ATTACKS IN TWO WEEKS ON THAI NAVY  
PATROL BOATS ON THE MEKONG, AND DEBATE OVER WHAT TO DO  
ABOUT THE GROWING NUMBER OF LAO REFUGEES HAVE BEEN FRONT  
PAGE MATERIAL IN THE NEWSPAPERS PUBLISHED IN ALL THREE  
LANGUAGES HERE.

2. THE EMBASSY STILL DOES NOT KNOW WHO UNLEASHED  
THE DISPUTE THIS PAST WEEK-END OVER THE HARM TO THAILAND  
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OF SHELTERING LAO RIGHTISTS, A POLICY FOR WHICH THE THAI

MILITARY RECEIVED BLAME (REFTEL). THEP THEWAKUN, CHIEF OF THE SOUTHEAST ASIA DIVISION AT THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS (MFA), DENIED TO AN EMBASSY OFFICER THAT HIS MINISTRY WAS THE SOURCE, BUT WE ARE YET TO BE CONVINCED. HE EMPHASIZED, HOWEVER, THAT THE RTG IS TRYING HARD TO MAINTAIN ITS TIES WITH LAOS, DESPITE SEIENT PROVOCATIONS.

HE SAID THAT PL LEADERS IN VIENTIANE, AT LEAST UNTIL THE MOST RECENT CABINET CHANGES, HAD ASSURED THE THAI OF THEIR WISH TO CONTINUE RELATIONS.

3. IN THIS CONTEXT, THEP OFFERED THE OFFICIAL EXPLANATION OF THE DECISION TO WITHDRAW PERSONNEL FROM THE THREE THAI CONSULATES INSIDE LAOS. HE SAID FOREIGN MINISTER PHOUMI VONGVICHIT REQUESTED THE THAI AMBASSADOR IN VIENTIANE TO BRING THE PERSONNEL THERE BECAUSE THE PGNU COULD NOT ASSURE THEIR SAFETY IN THE PROVINCES. PHOUMI TOLD THE THAI THE MOVE WAS TEMPORARY ONLY, AN EXPLANATION THAT THAI ACCEPTED ON THE SURFACE. THEY CANNOT FAIL TO HAVE NOTICED, HOWEVER, THAT PHOUMI HAS SINCE LEFT THE LAO SCENE.

4. THEP EXPRESSED HIS APPRECIATION FOR US EFFORTS TO ASSIST THE THAI IN FINDING A SOLUTION TO THE LAO REFUGEE PROBLEM, ONE WHICH IS GREATLY CONCERNING THE THAI. PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT PRAMOT TOLD A PRESS CONFERENCE JULY 14 THAT THE RTG 1) WILL NEVER ALLOW LAO RIGHTISTS TO STAGE A COUP AGAINST THE PGNU FROM THAILAND, 2) IS NOT INTERFERING IN LAO INTERNAL AFFAIRS IN ANY WAY, AND 3) SHOULD CONSIDER TRANSFERRING THE RIGHTISTS TO AREAS FAR FROM THE BORDER. AS FOR THE MEO, KHUKRIT ASSURED THE PRESS JULY 15 THAT THE RTG WILL NOT USE THEM AS A BUFFER AGAINST LAOS AND THEY "WILL HAVE TO RETURN HOME IN THE END."

5. A POINT OF GROWING LAO-U.S., AND BY SPIN-OFF LAO-THAI FRICTION, IS THE MFA SLOWDOWN OF PERMISSION FOR THE U.S. TO EXPORT THAI RICE FOR AID TO THE LAO MILITARY WITHOUT PAYING THE CUSTOMS EXPORT TAX. THE POLITICAL DEPARTMENT OF THE MFA HAS HELD UP FOR THE PAST SIX WEEKS A REQUEST

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FOR 104 TONS OF RICE, WHEREAS BEFORE THE PROTOCOL DEPARTMENT ROUTINELY APPROVED SUCH REQUESTS. KOSON SINTHAWANON, THE POLITICAL DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR GENERAL, TOLD THE POLITICAL COUNSELOR JULY 18 THAT HE WOULD TELL PROTOCOL TO GRANT THE EXCEMPTION ON THE CURRENT REQUEST, BUT THAT MFA WOULD PREFER THAT THE PGNU ITSELF COME TO THE RTG WITH SUCH APPEALS IN THE FUTURE. THE THAI, BY COMPELLING THE LAO TO LOOK OUT FOR THEIR OWN INTERESTS,

APPARENTLY HOPE TO STIMULATE GREATER DIALOG BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. WE ARE PRESSING MFA TO BE FLEXIBLE IN APPROVING REQUESTS FOR RICE WHICH EMBASSY VIENTIANE WOULD LIKE DELIVERED.

6. COMMENT. THAILAND, BY NOT KICKING UP A FUSS OVER THE CLOSING OF ITS CONSULATES, REPEATEDLY ASSURING THE PGNU THAT IT DOES NOT INTEND TO INTERFERE IN ITS AFFAIRS, STRESSING ITS INTENTION TO CONTROL THE LAO REFUGEES, AND PLAYING DOWN THE INCIDENTS ON THE MEKONG, IS DEMONSTRATING ITS DESIRE TO MAINTAIN ACCEPTABLE RELATIONS WITH A NEIGHBOR WITH WHOM THE THAI HAVE MUCH AFFINITY. IT IS PROBABLY NO ACCIDENT THAT THE RTG ANNOUNCED JULY 13 ONCE MORE THAT IT HAS BEGUN PROVIDING SOME 15 MILLION BAHT (\$750,000) IN AID TO LAOS, THOUGH IT PROVIDED PART OF THIS AID IN RICE SOME TWO MONTHS AGO.

7. THERE ARE PRESSURES ON THE RTG TO MODIFY THIS CONCILIATORY POLICY. REAR ADMIRAL KET TANTIWETCHAKUN, ASSISTANCE COMMANDER IN CHIEF OF THE ROYAL THAI NAVY, REPORTEDLY STATED JULY 16 THAT THAILAND WILL RETALIATE TO PROTECT ITS SOVEREIGNTY IF THE PL RESORT TO FURTHER SHOOTING ON THE MEKONG. DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER PRAMAN ADIREKSAN IS SAID TO HAVE PROPOSED CLOSING THE THAI-LAO BORDER IN A RECENT CABINET MEETING, WHICH REJECTED THE PROPOSAL, ACCORDING TO THE DAILY NATION ON JULY 17.

8. IN CONCLUSION, THEP NOTED THAT SO FAR THE RTG IS KEEPING ITS PATIENCE WITH LAOS AS IT ATTEMPTS TO RESOLVE OR PLAY DOWN ISSUES AFFECTING RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. HE, AT LEAST, HOPES THIS PATIENCE WILL CONTINUE.

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